

Church at Home

East Leake Methodist Church 27 June 2021

“Peter’s Denial”

Sing praise to the Lord,
all his faithful people!

Remember what the Holy One has done,
and give him thanks!

His anger lasts only a moment,
his goodness for a lifetime.

Tears may flow in the night,
but joy comes in the morning.

Psalm 145 vv1-3

Let us praise God by singing our first hymn

**StF 59: Lord, the light of your love is shining,
in the midst of the darkness, shining:**

3vv

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=op17raOTXbk>

Psalm of Adoration

Let us say together this psalm, which is 798 in Singing the Faith

Great and wonderful are your deeds,

Lord God, the Almighty

Just and true are your ways,

O ruler of the nations.

Who shall not revere and praise your name, O Lord?
for you alone are holy.

**All nations shall come and worship in your presence:
for your just dealings have been revealed.**

To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb

be blessing and honour and glory and might,

for ever and ever.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Most merciful God,

We confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed.

We have not wholeheartedly loved you;

we have not loved others as we have loved ourselves.

In your mercy, forgive our past sins,

amend what we are, and direct what we shall be.

So shall we delight in your will,

and go your way, with Jesus Christ our Lord

Silence

Hear God’s word of grace and the assurance of pardon:

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
Your sins are forgiven for his sake.

Amen

Introduction to the readings

June is Bible Month in the Methodist Church. Each year we are urged to study a part of the Bible in more depth than usual. This year the chosen book is the Gospel of St Mark.

Earlier this month Chris introduced us to the first three chapters of the gospel. Last week Jan led us in thinking of the story of Jesus stilling the waves of Lake Galilee in a storm. Next week Roger is going to discuss the very ending of the gospel.

So my task is to touch on the biggest and most important story in Mark's gospel – the story of Jesus' last week in Jerusalem leading up to his trial, crucifixion and death. There is the final story of the women discovering that His tomb is empty – but I must not pre-empt what Roger is going to say.

We celebrated that final week of our Lord as we celebrated Easter in April. I have picked out just one story from that week, the story of Peter's denial of his Lord. Today we will have one reading divided into two parts. The first part describes Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and his trial in front of the High Priest. We will then have a hymn. We will continue with our second reading which will recount Peter's denial of Christ.

First Reading: **Mark 14. 43-65**

We will reflect on the life of Jesus as we sing our next hymn

**StF 277: My song is love unknown,
my Saviour's love to me.**

7vv (omit vv 5 and 6 if wished)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWRcAa-nFIA>

Second Reading: **Mark 14. 66-72**

Address

As Chris reminded us earlier, the Mark who wrote the gospel was closely associated with Peter. We can work that out because of the number of stories about Peter in what is the shortest gospel of the four.

As the early Church grew, and as the first generation who knew Jesus died, people realised that it was really important to write down the stories that the disciples were telling them. That is why our gospels were written. Later still, the generations who came after, wrote down more about who the personalities in the gospels were and what happened to them. One of our main sources is Eusebius of Caesarea. He was a bishop who lived in Palestine about 300AD. He records the tradition that he knew, that is that Peter met Mark while Peter was preaching the gospel in Asia Minor. Peter took Mark as his travelling companion and interpreter. Together they arrived in Rome. It is thought that Mark wrote his gospel there, in Rome.

Eusebius records that Mark then left Rome, (and Peter), and went to Alexandria in Egypt. Alexandria was then, as it is now, a busy port and commercial city. In

Alexandria Mark helped to found one of the very first Christian churches, the Coptic Church. The Coptic Church is still ministering and preaching in Egypt, having survived during centuries of Islamic rule. It is estimated by Egyptian sources that 10% of Egyptians today are Christians.

Furthermore the Coptic Church in Egypt founded, and still has links with, churches in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Thanks to emigration, there are now also Coptic churches in the USA and in Britain and other countries too.

The Coptic Church reveres St Mark as its first bishop. It believes that he was born in Cyrene in Libya and it reveres him as the founder of Christianity in Africa. It believes that he was martyred by pagans in Alexandria in AD68 shortly after St Peter and St Paul were martyred in Rome.

I admit that I have tended to see African churches as the result of white missionary efforts. The movement Black Lives Matter has taught us not to undervalue or denigrate the achievements of non white peoples. So I'm glad to speak about this African group of churches, founded by someone thought to be an African, centuries before there were any churches in our part of the world.

Turning back to the gospel that Mark wrote, we see that the lives of St Mark and St Peter were intertwined. What did Mark hear Peter preach and say?

Surely one of the most personal of those stories was the story of Peter denying that he was a follower of Christ. The denial came just at the very moment when Christ was being tried for His life in the house of the Jewish High Priest.

We all know the story well. Peter was in the courtyard of the house. After Christ's arrest, Peter had found the courage to follow Jesus secretly as the soldiers took him away. We know from St John's gospel (John 18.15-16) that John also went. John managed to get inside the residence of the High Priest but Peter had to stay outside in the courtyard.

Peter sat down with the guards by the fire, no doubt hoping not to be noticed. But then one of the servant girls came by and recognised him as a friend of Jesus. Peter denied it, and went out into the entrance hoping to get away from her. But Mark records that the servant girl saw him there again and began to repeat to the bystanders "He is one of them!" Again Peter denied it. Yet a little while later, we are told, one of the bystanders realised that Peter had a Galilean accent. Jesus was known to be from Nazareth in Galilee so the bystander said "Surely, you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

What a heart stopping moment that must have been for Peter! The bystanders looked at him ... and he said ...

and he cursed himself and said "I don't know this man you're talking about."

Immediately the cock crowed a second time.

So what does this story mean for us?

Perhaps the first thing is to ask "Is the story true?" Is Peter's denial the sort of thing that people do to protect themselves when they are in danger? To me it does sound true.

Peter was acknowledged as one of the leaders among Jesus' disciples. Only a few hours before, at the Last Supper, Jesus had predicted that all his disciples would run

away and leave Him (Mark 14.31). Peter had protested "I will never leave you". Jesus went on to say that that night Peter would disown Him three times, before the cock crowed twice. But Peter insisted emphatically that "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And, we are told by Mark, all the others there said the same. Fine words!

Let us stand outside the story for a moment and ask, what good would it have done for Peter to have spoken up then and say that he was a disciple of Jesus? Peter was outside the house of the High Priest, surrounded by guards. His leader Jesus was on trial for his life inside. What good would it have done for Peter to speak up?

But that was not how Peter saw it. Peter knew it as the moment when he had let his friend down. At the Last Supper he had been so sure that he would never deny his Master. This is a story of failure.

This story must have come from Peter himself. None of the other disciples was there at that moment. Peter must have chosen to repeat the story. It must have been difficult for Peter to share it. He had broken down and wept at the scene. Later he must have had many moments of anguish and of deep shame as he thought about what he had done, and as he remembered the boasts that he had made earlier that night. He had failed His Lord and his friend.

Yet it was this inadequate person who became the leader of the early Church in Rome. It was this inadequate person who Jesus met in Galilee after His resurrection and who Jesus asked "Do you love me?". St John in his gospel records (John 21.15-19) that three times Jesus asked "Do you love me?" and three times Peter replied "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you". And three times Jesus commanded him to "Feed my lambs". This was Jesus telling Peter to take up again his position as a leader among the disciples.

It is often suggested that Jesus did this three times to cancel out that three fold denial on that awful night. I feel that that is right. The Lord spoke to Peter in front of the six other disciples who were fishing together with Peter. That helped to cancel out the memory of the three denials in front of the bystanders at the house of the High Priest.

This story from Mark tells us a truth that we need to hear again and again, that Our Lord accepts us as we are; failures and all. He accepts us as we are; and He transforms us into something better. His spirit empowers us, his death redeems us and his love gives us relief from feelings of sin and shame. How wonderful is it to know that He accepts us as His people. All praise and glory be to His name!

And also thanks to St Peter who had the courage to share the story with his friends, and to St Mark who wrote it down.

Let us exalt Jesus as our king as we sing our next hymn

**StF 333: Majesty, worship his majesty;
unto Jesus be glory, honour and praise.** 3vv

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaRwD2Y7C0s>

We will now pray for other people and for our world.

Prayers of Intercession

There is a response to this prayer

Lord of all,

Response In your name we pray

Dear Lord,

fill your church with love and understanding,
so that she may show forth your gospel love.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

Fill your people with respect for each other,
a willingness to listen and a generosity to share.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

Enable us to listen to and help

all who suffer through injustice, disability or neglect.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

May those who make decisions for us be so guided by you,
that they use their power wisely for the good of all.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

May those who suffer in pain, loneliness or grief
know the power of your healing love.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

May we,

in all we do and say,

and in all we are and strive to be,

be filled with your loving power.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray, Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father ...

Just as St Peter and St Mark served God in their time in Rome and in Alexandria, let us serve God in our time. Our last hymn is a call to action

**StF 410: Lord, your Church on earth is seeking
 your renewal from above;
 teach us all the art of speaking
 with the accent of your love.**

3vv

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnYUfhtz11Q>

Closing Prayers

In weakness, O Lord, be our strength;
in our sinfulness, pardoning love;
in our need, all sufficient grace.
In our anxiety, be to us both stillness and rest; and
at all times be to us the fullness of blessing;
through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

We finish our service by sharing in the Grace

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen